

Place: Lurgan 18:5:2008

Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-12

## WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

### 2. COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Someone has said that Longfellow could take a worthless sheet of paper, write a poem on it, and make it worth \$6000, that is **Genius**. Rockefeller could sign his name to a piece of paper and make it worth a million dollars, that is **Capital**. Uncle Sam can take gold, stamp and eagle on it, and make it worth \$20, that is **Money**. A mechanic can take material that is worth only £5 and make it worth a £100-00, that is **Skill**. An artist can take a canvas worth very little and paint a picture on it, and make it worth a £1000, that is **Art**. But God can take a worthless, sinful life, wash it in the blood of His Son, put His Spirit within it, and make it a blessing to humanity, that is **Salvation**. As Peter wrote to these sufferings saints scattered throughout the regions of Asia Minor, he was marvelling at the wonder of God's grace that had brought him and his readers out of their sins and into Gods family.

It is obvious from this epistle that Peter and his readers were facing trials ( 1:6-7 ) Indeed they were on the brink of further and even greater persecution ( 4:12 )

The significant thing is that Peter, after his opening address, does not begin with a list of their difficulties nor even with direct words of consolation but with a hymn of praise to God for His blessings. ***You see even the fiercest tribulation must be faced in the context of counting our blessings.*** Now the very notion of commencing an epistle that is meant to soothe the bleeding wounds of a scattered, suffering and persecuted community by striking a theme of praise to God, rather than expressing immediate sympathy with has appeared too many as a psychological blunder of the first order, and as revealing a writer of gross insensitivity.

But before we join the pundits and criticise Peter, let us take a look at his particular strategy. For, let us be sure of this, he is acting as the Lord's under-shepherd in this matter, and we believe that his *pastoral psychology* is as clearly indicative of Divine Inspiration as the *pastoral theology* he begins to unfold. Do you recall how he address's these saints ? **He stress's the fact that as sure as they were the castaways of society, so also were they the called of God.** He sets the two opposing actions in direct contrast to one another, so that the sting involved in their being "*scattered,*" is countered by the solace conveyed by the term "*elect.*" But Peter goes a step further. You see, he realises that scattered, persecuted believers face a great temptation. The temptation to self-pity. So what does Peter do ?

My .... with adoring wonder and some measure of personal excitement, he turns the eyes and hearts of his readers away from themselves and their circumstances

to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He would summon them away from all temptation to self-pity and give themselves in praise to Him who has acted so mightily and so graciously on their behalf. Thus he begins this letter with a hymn of praise. *For God must be praised by all His people, including His scattered servants who have become as the off-scouring of the world, because of their vital relationship to God.*

So here is a hymn of worship designed to encourage us who are living in a hostile world to look past our temporal troubles and rejoice in our eternal inheritance.

In effect Peter says in these opening verses says, “**Count your Blessings.**” Have you done that recently? Have you taken time just to sit down and ponder the goodness of God. Peter gives us three reasons why we should bless the Lord.

### **(1) THE MERCY OF GOD HAS REACHED US IN THE PAST**

Look if you will at ( 1:3 ) “ *Blessed be the God .... dead.* ” ( 1:3 ) Do you ever think of God’s mercy? God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve. Hell. God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve. Heaven. That word “ *mercy,* ” seems to focus attention upon the pitiable condition of the objects of the divine action as well as upon the totally undeserved nature of the action itself. The word in the New Testament is used to describe the kindness of God in bringing the rank outsider, the totally unworthy Gentile sinner into the sphere of God’s compassion so that he

shares in the eternal riches of the salvation wrought in Christ.

( Eph 2:1-7 ) My .... God’s mercy is **great:**

( 1 Kings 3:6 ) **plenteous:** ( Ps 86:5 ) **tender:**

( Lk 1:78 ) **abundant:** indeed “ *it is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him.* ” ( Ps 103:17 )

Well, may we say with the psalmist, “ *I will sing aloud of Thy mercy.* ” ( Ps 59:16 ) Now you will notice here that two great blessings are traced to the mercy of God. Peter says, “ *By His boundless mercy we have been born again.* ” ( Amplified ) The first blessing then is,

#### **(a) NEW LIFE:**

The word “ *begotten,* ” reminds us of Christ’s statement to Nicodemus, “ *Ye must be born again.* ” ( Jn 3:7 ) This is exactly what Peter is thinking of here. He is speaking of regeneration, that act of God whereby the very life of God is communicated to those who trust Christ as their Saviour. ( 2 Pet 1:4 ) And Peter makes it clear that this new life is Divine in its Origin, for its God who hath begotten us. Scholars tell us that

“ *begotten,* ” is the *arisis* tense. This means that when you were born again, you were “ *born again,* ” once for all. Something that is the *arisis* tense, means that it happened, never ever to be repeated. How many times can a man be born physically? One time. How many times can a man be born spiritually? Just once. My .... this is not something we have achieved anymore than we have achieved our physical birth.

You see two parents create this new birth, the Spirit of

God and the Word of God. We are born again, by the Word of God, the living Word of God. ( 1:23 ) The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and reveals the Son of God. And when you trust Christ as your Saviour, a miracle takes place in your heart, regeneration: you are born again. And the “ *two spiritual parents,*” who accomplish this birth are the Spirit of God and the Word of God. ( Jn 3:5 ) My .... can you lift up your heart in praise to God for new life ? Are you a new creation in Christ ? Have you been “ *born again ?*” Has God imparted His new life to you ? There is another blessing here, which is traced to the mercy of God. Not only (a) but,

**(b) NEW HOPE:**

Peter calls it a living hope. Now hope is one of the great words and concepts of this epistle. Just as Paul is the apostle of faith, and John is the apostle of love, so Peter is the apostle of hope. Indeed this “ *living hope,*” is the major theme of Peter’s first letter. He is saying to all believers, “ *Be hopeful.*” The cynical editor and writer H.L. Mencken one of America’s newspaper men once defined hope as “ *a pathological belief in the occurrence of the impossible.*” To the unsaved hope is nothing more than mental fantasy. It’s the kind of Disneyland hope that says, “ *I sure hope I win the lottery.*” But that definition does not agree with the New Testament meaning of the word. True Christian hope is more “ *hope so.*” It is confident assurance of future glory and blessing. My .... the world says, “ *While there is life there is hope, but the believer says where there is Christ there is hope.*” We have “ *a*

*living hope,*” because this hope is grounded on the living Word of God ( 1:23 ) and is made possible by the living Son of God who triumphed over death.

You see our hope this .... is built on a solid foundation. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Christ had died and not risen then our preaching would be in vain: ( 1 Cor 15:14 ) our faith would be in vain: ( 1 Cor 15:14 ) we would yet be in our sins and we would be of all men most miserable. ( 1 Cor 15:19 ) “ *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.*” ( 1 Cor 15:20 ) Do you recall the motto of the Yorkshire miners strike some years ago when Margaret Thatcher was in power ? It was this, “ ***One out, all out.***” My .... the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the pledge, proof, assurance of our resurrection. Did He Himself not say, “ *Because I live ye shall live also.*” ( Jn 14:19 ) Because of Christ’s resurrection we are absolutely sure of future glory and blessing.

And my .... this hope will enable us to face inward turmoil and outward trial. Do you want to be able to smile through your tears ? To be able to rejoice through times of suffering ? Just keep reminding yourself, that as a Christian what you’re going through isn’t the end of the story, it’s simply the rough journey that leads to the right destination. One of the early Church Fathers was a man by the name of John Chrysostom. ( 347 .... 407 AD ) His preaching against the sins of his age aroused the Empress Eudoxia. He was arrested, deposed, and his life was threatened. When his friends gathered around him, embracing him and kissing his

garments, Chrysostom said to them, “ *What can I fear ?*  
*Will it be death ? But you know that Christ is my life, and I shall gain by death.! Will it be exile ? But the earth and all its fullness is the Lord's. Will it be the loss of wealth ? But we brought nothing into this world, and can carry nothing out. Thus all the terrors of the world are contemptible in my eyes, and I smile at all its good things. Poverty I do not fear. Riches I do not sigh for. Death I do not shrink from, and life I do not desire, save only for the progress of your souls.*”  
 My .... here was a man enjoying “ *the living hope,*” and as a consequence was able to look into the face of death and be master of the situation. My .... is your heart filled with praise and thanksgiving to God whose mercy has brought you new life and new hope ? (1)

## **(2) THE GLORY OF GOD IS AWAITING US IN THE FUTURE**

Do you recall Paul’s words, “ *We .... rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*” ( Rom 5:2 ) What do we mean by the glory of God ? Warren Wiersbe says “ *The glory of God means the sum total of all that God is and does.*”  
 Now “ *Glory,*” is not a separate attribute of God, such as His holiness, wisdom or mercy. Everything that God is and does is characterised by glory. Now here Peter describes the glory of God awaiting us in terms of an “ *inheritance.*” ( 1:4 ) An inheritance is something you get. It is something that is yours out there in the future. I heard about a couple of wasters who were out in the park one day, just fooling around. Then one of them started crying, and the other one said, “ *what’s the*

*matter with you ?*” He said, “ *Oh, I heard that Rockefeller died today.*” The other one said, “ *well, what are you crying about ? You are not one of his heirs.*” He said, “ *That’s what I am crying about.*” Do you see what Peter is saying ? He’s saying we can rejoice through suffering because we have a permanent inheritance, a secure home in heaven. My .... can you imagine what this meant to these people to whom Peter was writing ? Dispersed, and dispossessed of their material treasures they may be, but these same people are heirs to an inheritance that knows no rival among the estates of this world. My .... do you see how Peter describes it ?

### **(a) IT IS UNDYING:**

Look if you will at ( 1:4 ) “ *An inheritance incorruptible,*” ( 1:4 ) The word used by Peter can mean, “ *imperishable, incorruptible, or immortal not liable to death, not subject to destruction.*” Probably, the point is that whereas the Land of Palestine could be over-run and destroyed by invading forces, the saint’s inheritance can’t be thus corrupted or blasted. My .... is this not glorious ? To know that our inheritance, heaven, glory, God Himself ( Ps 16:5 73:25 ) is not only beyond the reach of change and decay, but secure against any invading forces. (a)

### **(b) IT IS UNDEFILED:**

“ *And undefiled ....,*” ( 1:4 ) My .... all possessions here are defiled and stained with many defects and failings. No marble without its flaw, no flower without its

freckle, no fruit without its blight, no face without its blemish, no joy without its taint, no day without its regret, and no heart except one without sin. The earthly land of Palestine was often defiled, and polluted by false worship. God tells His people through Jeremiah, “ *And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof, and the goodness thereof: but when ye entered ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.* ” ( Jer 2:7 23 3:2 ) But my ... how different will be our heavenly home. It will be untouched by earth’s stains. Indeed John says “ And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.” ( 21:27 ) All the major cities of this earth today are great centres of sin but not this heavenly city. Nothing unclean will ever come into it. My ... in the New Jerusalem there will be no pornography, no dial-a-porn, no teenage suicide, no aids, no cancer, no rape, no missing children, no gay right marches, no drug problems, and no murders. Listen,

*Our pain shall then be over  
We’ll sin and sigh no more  
Behind us all of sorrow  
And naught but joy before  
A joy in our Redeemer  
As we to Him are nigh  
In the crowing day that’s coming  
By and by*

**(c) IT IS UNFADING:**

Do you see what Peter says “ *And that fadeth not*

*away.* ” ( 1:4 ) This phrase translates a word that was used in secular Greek to describe a flower that did not wither or die. ( amaranton ) The most fertile and fruitful territory in Israel sometimes lost its loveliness, its loveliest flowers faded and its rarest beauties passed away. But, by contrast, the inheritance of the twice-born blood-sprinkled people of God is unfading and unwithering. My ... it’s glory is ever new. Are you beginning to see the “ *inheritance,* ” that is yours through Christ ? This is our future home. Do you like it ? Talk about moving up to a better neighbourhood. My ... enemies cannot destroy it for it is incorruptible, sin cannot mar it for it is undefiled, time cannot change it for “ *it fadeth not away.* ” ( 1:4 ) But Peter tells us something else. It is not only (a) (b) (c)

**(d) IT IS UNFAILING:**

Look at ( 1:4 ) again “ *Reserved in heaven for you.* ” ( 1:4 ) That word, “ *reserved,* ” means “ *to reserve, to set aside.* ” Oh, these believers may have been robbed of their homes and material possessions, but their inheritance as Christians can’t be lost. It is preserved in such a sphere as makes it absolutely secure. But what is this wonderful inheritance that the Christian possesses ?

Is it all that is ours now in Christ ? ( Eph 1:3 ) Is it all that is ours in the future in glory ? ( 1:5 ) I’m sure it is. But it’s something more, for our inheritance is the Lord Himself. Not just the blessings but the blesser. For we are “ *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.* ” ( Rom 8:17 ) That’s why the psalmist said, “ *The Lord*

*is the portion of mine inheritance,” ( Ps 16:5 ) and later on, “ Whom have I in heaven but Thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.” ( Ps 73:25-26 ) Was it that thought that made Anne Cousins pen those beautiful words,*

**The bride eyes not her garment  
But her dear bridegrooms face  
I will not gaze at glory  
But on my King of grace  
Not at the crown He giveth  
But on His pierced hand  
The Lamb is all the glory  
Of Immanuel’s land**

“ *But,*” someone may say, “ *there’s many a slip between the cup and the lip.*” What if we falter and fail to arrive at our destination ? Men point to the weakness of the flesh and the obstacles on the way, Satanic as well as human, and despairingly ask, “ *How can we possibly arrive at our inheritance ?*” Well, Peter here replies and in so doing he calms our fears. He says,

### **(3) THE POWER OF GOD WILL KEEP US IN THE PRESENT**

" Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” ( 1:5 ) You see the Lord is not only keeping heaven for us ( 1:4 ) but He is keeping us for heaven. Not only is the

“ *glory,*” being reserved for us, but we are being kept for the “ *glory.*” Peter says,

#### **(a) WE ARE KEPT BY:**

The “ *power of God.*” ( 1:5 ) That word “ kept,” is a military word. It means “ *guarded, shielded.*” It would have been used in the context of keeping prisoners in a castle. There was absolutely no chance of them escaping. ( 2 Cor 11:32 ) The tense of the verb reveals that we are constantly being guarded by God, assuring us that we shall safely arrive in heaven. My ... with unslumbering devotion God watches over and protects His redeemed people. Is this not what the psalmist said, “ *As the mountains are round about Jerusalem so the Lord is round about His people henceforth even for ever.*” ( Ps 125:1-2 ) Is this not what Saviour said, “ *I gave unto them eternal life and they shall never perish.*” ( Jn 10:28 ) Don’t you ever get the idea that you keep yourself saved. You don’t. We are kept by the power of God. A father was taking his little boy across the street in heavy traffic, and he said, “ ***Son come on, take Daddy’s hand and hold on.***” They went across the street and that little boy’s chubby hand just reached around Daddy’s finger. Then suddenly the lights changed and Daddy saw the on coming traffic.

So he slipped his finger out of the little boy’s chubby fist and he took his fist and put it in his great big manly hand and just dragged the little boy across the street to safety. When they got to the other side the little boy looked up at his Daddy and said, “ ***I held on Daddy.***” Now let me tell you something. It was Daddy holding

on to him and this is the way it is with us. We re kept by the power of God. My .... do you feel that you won't make it ? Do you think that you won't reach heaven ? Then think about the Power of God. Think about Gods power in Creation, in History, in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Now, can the same power keep you ?

*The storm may roar without me,  
My path may low be laid  
But God is round about me,  
And can I be dismayed*

**(b) WE ARE KEPT THROUGH:**

“ *Through faith,* ” ( 1:5 ) Kept by .... that's Gods Sovereignty. Kept through .... that's Mans Responsibility. My .... would you realise God's keeping power ? Then don't look at the weakness of self, the awfulness of the situation, the fierceness of the foe, but by faith look to Him, the “ *Lord is thy keeper, the Lord shall preserve thee.* ” ( Ps 121:5 ) But notice,

**(c) WE ARE KEPT UNTO:**

“ *Salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* ” How long will the Lord guard us ? How long will the Lord keep us ? Until the Saviour returns and we share in the final aspect of Gods “ *so great salvation.* ” What a thrilling thing it is to know that we were born for glory.  
My .... like these believers are you facing trials and

difficulties ? Are your circumstances such that you are tempted to give way to self-pity ? Then “ **Count your Blessings.** ” You have known God's mercy in the past, you do know God's power in the present, you will know God's glory in the future. What more do we need ?

*Trust in Him ye saints for ever  
He is faithful changing never  
Neither force, nor guile can sever  
Those He loves from Him*